

# HIZBUT TAHRIR INDONESIA AND THE IDEA OF RESTORING ISLAMIC CALIPHATE<sup>1</sup>

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## **ABSTRAK**

*Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia (HTI) merupakan salah satu cabang dari organisasi internasional, Hizbut Tahrir. HTI menyebarkan agendanya dengan menekankan pada kewajiban bagi Muslim untuk menciptakan kembali kekhalifahan Islam mengingat HTI meyakini bahwa hal itu merupakan jalan utama untuk mengagungkan Islam sebagai kekuatan dominan. Studi ini berargumen bahwa keinginan HTI untuk menciptakan kembali kekhalifahan Islam bertentangan dengan ide negara kebangsaan di Indonesia. Dasar kerangka teori studi ini adalah bagian dari dimensi 'politik-agama' dalam hubungan antarbangsa. Studi ini menggunakan analisis historis untuk memahami perdebatan antara ide sistem khalifah dan negara bangsa dengan menganalisis ide HTI mengenai pembentukan kembali khilafah Islam. Analisis menunjukkan bahwa ketegangan antara HTI dengan elemen lain dalam masyarakat Indonesia berkaitan dengan pengaturan negara melambangkan kompetisi yang berkelanjutan antara kelompok Islamis dan nasionalis.*

**Kata Kunci:** *Khilafah Islam, negara bangsa, Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia*

## **ABSTRACT**

The Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia (HTI) is a branch of international Islamic organization, Hizbut Tahrir. HTI propagates its agenda by emphasizing that it is an obligation for Muslims to restore the Islamic caliphate since HTI believes that it is the ultimate way to glorify Islam as a dominant power. This study will argue that HTI's desire to restore the Islamic caliphate conflicts with the idea of nation state in Indonesia. The basic theoretical framework in this study is part of the 'politico-religious' dimension of world affairs. This study undertakes the historical analysis to understand the debate between the idea of Islamic caliphate and the idea of nation state by analyzing HTI's idea to restore the Islamic caliphate. The analysis shows that the tension between HTI and other elements of Indonesian society regarding how the state should be ordered symbolizes the continuing competition between Islamists and nationalists.

**Keywords:** *Islamic caliphate, nation state, Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia*

## **BACKGROUND**

The Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia (HTI), literally means "the Liberation Party of Indonesia", is one of the Islamic groups in Indonesia which consistently strive to restore the Islamic caliphate. Although HTI attempts to bring about a fundamental change to the Indonesian political structure, it refuses to participate in national elections. Unlike other fundamentalist groups, HTI does not have militia units and rejects the use of force to achieve its goals. It prefers to use peaceful means to address

Islamic issues by organizing rallies and demonstrations (Fealy, 2004, p. 117).

The main goal of HTI is to restore the Islamic caliphate in order to reshape the Muslim society and state. HTI argues that it is Muslims' obligation to establish an Islamic caliphate which is not based solely on historical realities, but is also commanded by God and the Prophet Muhammad as a holy way to apply Islamic law and to unite Muslims worldwide. It believes that Muslims are currently dominated politically, economically,

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socially, and culturally by non-believers. The best way to liberate Muslims from subjugation is to establish an Islamic caliphate (Fealy, 2004, p. 116; Ahnaf, 2006). For HTI, restoring an Islamic caliphate does not have to return to the last Ottoman caliphate. Rather it aims to be similar to the caliphate on the path of Prophethood, by taking the example of the Prophet Muhammad as continued by the caliphs (the rightly-guided caliphate) who were the Prophet's prominent companions.

Historically, the HTI is a branch of international organization, Hizbut Tahrir. It was founded in Jerusalem in 1953 by Taqiuddin al-Nabhani, a Palestinian religious scholar and judge. Influenced by Muslim Brotherhood (*Al Ikhwan Al Muslimun*)<sup>2</sup> thought, Taqiuddin's perspective lies in his disapproval of Western imperialism and his determination to reverse its damaging impact on Muslim societies through the return to Islamic forms (Taji-Farouki, 1996; Fealy, 2004, p. 116). The severe realities of the continued suppression by the West, the loss of Palestine, and the entrenchment of the nation-state with its associated secular politics, posed a serious challenge to Taqiuddin's traditional roots (Taji-Farouki, 1996).

Hizbut Tahrir began its activity in Indonesia in 1982–83 through the efforts of Abdullah bin Nuh, an Indonesian preacher and lecturer, and Abdurrahman al-Baghdadi, an Australian-based HT teacher and activist. Bin Nuh and Al-Baghdadi developed the organization and built a strong following among tertiary students and young intellectuals in Java and Sumatra (Fealy, 2004, p. 116). In attempt to disseminate the party's ideology, HTI held an international conference in 2000 and 2007 on the Islamic caliphate issue, which highlighted the uneasy relations and views between religion and the state in Indonesia.

Although the HTI uphold a radical ideology, they see themselves as a peaceful group by employing

peaceful and systemic mobilization strategies and avoiding violence (Hwang, 2009). Regarding its goal to establish an Islamic caliphate, HTI is also among the Islamic groups which are struggling to establish an Islamic state in Indonesia. According to HTI's rationale, an Islamic state should be established before applying sharia (Islamic law). This point of view differs from other Islamic groups which try to apply sharia in Indonesia without becoming an Islamic state (Ahnaf, 2006, p. 7).

Paradoxically, HTI identifies itself as a political party, but refuses to participate in the Indonesian electoral process or any other aspect of the secular system. HTI activists believe that sharia, especially those related to the public, such as *hudud* (the law of limitations), *jinayat* (the criminal law), and *takzir* (the penal law), can be administered only by a caliph, and not by individuals, groups, a president, or a prime minister, as in a secular system (Ahnaf, 2006, p. 7).

HTI believes that applying sharia in a secular state is both problematic and meaningless. In HTI's understanding, it looks like constructing a mosque on the foundations of a movie theatre or nightclub as symbols of decadence. It also believes that such a system would lead to compromise, which would distort and remove parts of Islamic law and place crucial issue areas like the economy and politics under a non-Islamic system (Ahnaf, 2006, p. 7).

According to HTI's rationale, Islamic parties' attempts to apply Islamic law in secular states have failed in countries that use a democratic system (Ahnaf, 2006, p. 8). In the case of Indonesia, Islamic parties were defeated by nationalistic parties; in Malaysia, the Islamic Parties of Malaysia (PAS) was defeated by the United Malay National Organizations (UMNO); in Jordan, the Ikhwan Party and Islamic Action party lost; in Egypt, Ikhwanul Muslimin, led by Hassan al-Banna, failed to place its candidates in parliament in 1945 (Ahnaf, 2006, p. 8).

However, mainstream Muslims<sup>3</sup> have a different point of view regarding the Islamic state discourse. According to them, it is not significant to establish an Islamic state in formal ideologi-

<sup>2</sup> Muslim Brotherhood (MB) is an international Islamist movement founded by the Sufi schoolteacher Hassan al-Banna in 1928 in Egypt. It is the world's largest and most influential political Islamist group. Several linked groups have since formed across many nations of the Muslim world. MB supporters claim that while Al Qaeda is violent, the Brotherhood's theology and methods is "reformist", "democratic", "non-violent" and "mainly political". See Taji-Farouki (1996) *A Fundamental Quest: Hizb al-Tahrir and the Search for the Islamic Caliphate*, London: Grey Seal.

<sup>3</sup> The majority of Indonesian Muslims, as represented by mainstream organizations such as the Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) and Muhammadiyah, have millions of members.

cal terms. The important thing is that the state guarantees the existence of Islam's basic values, and there is no legitimate basis to put Islam in opposition to the secular system (Effendy, 2003, p. 7).

This paper describes the HTI's desire to restore an Islamic caliphate. HTI propagates its agenda by emphasizing that it is an obligation for Muslims to restore an Islamic caliphate since HTI believes that it is the ultimate way to glorify Islam as a dominant power. This study will argue that HTI's desire to restore an Islamic caliphate conflicts with the idea of nation state in Indonesia. Although the popular view in Indonesia sees Islam and the secular system as being compatible, the HTI sees these as being quite the opposite.

The research method of this paper is textual analysis. It analyses the existing literature which consists of published literature such as books, journals, newspapers, and information from websites related to HTI. The basic theoretical framework in this study is part of the 'politico-religious' dimension of world affairs.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In the last generations, religion has become one of the most influential factors in world affairs. However, it remains as one of the least examined factors in the study and practice of world affairs (Ersoy, 2012, p. 88). In International Relations discipline, religion is often being connected with conflict and violence. In line with this argument, Jonathan Fox (Fox, 2004, p. 716) states that:

"For most of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the dominant paradigm in the social sciences on this topic was that religion would have no role in modern society and politics. The political science version of this paradigm, modernization theory, posits that processes inherent in modernization should inevitably lead to the demise of primordial factors like ethnicity and religion in politics. These processes include urbanization, economic development, modern social institutions, growing rates of literacy and education, pluralism, and advancements in science and technology. While this literature tends to focus on ethnicity, it is also clearly meant to apply to religion. In contrast, secularization theory, the sociological analogue of modernization theory, does focus on religion. It posits that the same factors cited by modernization theory will lead

to the demise of religion, which is to be replaced by secular, rational, and scientific phenomena."

However, after the end of the Cold War, religious actors, practices, and institutions have been able to be seen in international relations' practice. They have become more visible after 9/11 where relevancy of religion was increased in international affair's practice. Scholars belief that there was a return and a resurgence of religion from the exile on the margins of rational politics (Fitzgerald, 2011, p. 28). Despite majority of studies examine the relationship between violence and religion, especially Islam, there are some studies which discuss the place and role of religion in international relations. One of them is Pavlos Hatzopoulos and Fabio Petito's book *Religion and International Relations: The Return from Exile*, who argue that "the rejection of religion seems to be inscribed in the genetic code of the discipline of IR", contend that "having unexpectedly survived the long Westphalian exile, religion is back to the center of international relations" (Ersoy, 2012, p. 82).

In the context of Islam, the idea of restoring Islamic caliphate have become the agenda of the Islamists. The caliphate is an Islamic form of government representing the political unity and leadership of the Muslim world. The idea of restoring Islamic caliphate can be analysed in the context of world affairs since it challenged the secular system of nation states. After 9/11, in his first speech, Osama bin Laden criticised injustices amongst Muslim which have become a justification for terrorist acts against the West and accused the European role for ousting the last Ottoman caliph in the nineteenth century (Kazimi, 2008, p. 1). However, most of Islamists are more focused on restoring earlier caliphates in the era of the four rightly Guided Caliphs who ruled after Prophet Muhammad's death in the seventh century or the Abbasid caliphate that established from the ninth to the thirteenth centuries and abolished by the Mongols. Some Western and Islamic thinkers have made up a narrative of the caliphate as a lasting institution and central to Islam and Islamic thought. However, in reality, the caliphate is a political or religious idea with little relevance to contemporary condition (Danforth, 2014).

## POLITICAL SETTING

The downfall of the Soeharto regime in May 1998 led to the disassembling of the repressive structures imposed by the New Order and can be seen as a major breakthrough for the democratic process (Effendy, 2003). Restrictions on political parties, the media, freedom of speech and association were lifted and democratic elections were held (Fealy, 2004, p. 104). These features of democracy were not seen in the Soeharto era. Election rallying alone could have resulted in jail for the leader of political groups. This major development had singular significance for Muslims as they now had, after four decades of repression, the freedom to express their political aspirations (Trotter, 2006, p. 1). The development of Islamic parties was not only encouraged but a number of radical Islamic organizations rose in the public sphere to vie for popular support (Effendy, 2003). These organizations expressed their political aspirations in a strong and militant way.

The resurgence of Islamic militant groups showed that previously repressed groups were now able to organize freely. In contemporary Indonesia, the most prominent of these groups include: Front Pembela Islam (FPI, or the Islamic Defenders' Front); Forum Komunikasi Ahlus Sunnah Wal Jamaah (FKAWJ, or the Communication Forum for the Adherents of the Prophetic Tradition and the Community) along with its militia wing Laskar Jihad (the Warrior of Jihad); Majelis Mujahidin Indonesia (MMI, the Indonesian Islamic Warrior's Council) along with its Laskar Mujahidin (the Mujahidin Brigade), and Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia (the Liberation Party of Indonesia) (Effendy, 2003, p. 218).

Some analysts (Effendy, 2003, p. 217) view the existence of these organizations as an affirmation of the resurgence of Islamic militant groups in post-New Order Indonesia. The blunt attitude and militant overtones of these organizations in articulating Islam signal the spread of Islamic militancy and a challenge to the legitimacy of the secular system adopted by Indonesian state-makers. According to analysts, all of these groups seek a dramatic change within Indonesian society and politics (Effendy, 2003, p. 217). They all share the same concern that the state and the

greater Muslim society should undertake sharia law more seriously. Specifically, their concerns include the implementation of sharia law, the establishment of an Islamic state and ultimately an Islamic caliphate (Fealy, 2004, p. 106). They perceive the existence of the secular system in Indonesia as the prolongation of the Western hegemony responsible for the on-going politico-economic crisis (Hassan, 2006, p. 217). Instead of the secular system, they propose the sharia as an alternative basis for the state and strongly emphasize its superiority over any other system (Hassan, 2006, p. 217).

In doing so, they attempt to bring Islam to the center of the national political discourse. They demonstrate a strong desire to replace the existing system and to establish Islam as a comprehensive system covering political, social, economic, and cultural affairs. They also have the same agenda with regard to challenging Western domination and influence, especially that of the US (Umam, 2006, p. 8). Although these groups share similar concerns in these respects, they differ in their advocacy of their concerns. Though they utilize connected networks, each of them is a separate organization (Umam, 2006, p. 8). The advent of a globalized world has also encouraged many analysts to connect these new developments in Indonesia to the worldwide trend of Islamic fundamentalism (Effendy, 2003, p. 217). Some of the groups, for example, have connections with the international Islamic movement, while others might only share ideas and thoughts (Effendy, 2003, p. 217).

In a national context, Fealy (2004) argues that the resurgence of Islamic militant groups is a response to the transition to a post-New Order democracy. However, Effendy (2003, p. 218) argues that the development of militant groups is merely a reaction to socio-religious and political circumstances which developed during the transition period. In this regard, it is important to note that both the national and international context have triggered the resurgence of these groups. In the national context, the incapacity of the state to run effectively and to solve the urgent problems concerning the lives of Muslims, has led to socio-religious conflicts in several provinces in Indonesia—notably West and Central Kalimantan,



Eastern Nusa Tenggara, the Moluccas, and Central Sulawesi. The lack of law enforcement with regard to gambling and prostitution, or the regulation of alcoholic beverages has caused dissatisfaction among Indonesian Muslims, which has led to the emergence of militant groups (Effendy, 2003, p. 218; Hassan, 2006, p. 13). Likewise, in the international context, the US foreign policy towards the Islamic world is frequently perceived as discriminatory and unjust, especially concerning Palestine, Afghanistan, and Iraq. These factors have contributed much to the resurgence of the Islamic militant groups (Effendy, 2003, p. 218).

### **THE DEVELOPMENT OF HIZBUT TAHRIR INDONESIA**

This section looks primarily at the perspective of the group which believes a caliphate would be better than nation-state by analysing the development of Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia (HTI) as a case study. This section analyses further the history of HTI, therefore, the development of its radical agenda, the way this is at odds with the current conception of a nation-state and how in the future, it may lead to tension with the state. The HTI has not yet received any significant attention from scholars, despite having existed for some decades before the downfall of Soeharto regime. Although HTI has been accused of radicalizing young people compared to other groups (Peter, 2007), HTI is unique in that it uses peaceful means to promote the radical idea of restoring the Islamic caliphate. HTI is also unique in that although it claims to be a political party, it refuses to participate in national elections (Fealy, 2004, p. 117). Compared to other Indonesian organizations, HTI is the only organization which is directed by foreign leadership. It draws its strict ideology from its central organization (HT) and it has a global agenda (Fealy, 2007, p. 152).

In order to understand the development of Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia (HTI), we need to understand the history and ideology of HTI's central organization, Hizbut Tahrir al-Islami (HT). Hizbut Tahrir al-Islami (the Islamic Liberation Party) was founded in Jerusalem in 1953 by Taqiuddin al-Nabhani, a Palestinian religious scholar and judge, to establish an Islamic state and to liberate Palestine. According to Commins (1991, p. 194),

the party broadened its primary concern with Palestine to the goal of building up an Islamic state that would restore an Islamic caliphate as the ultimate Islamic order throughout the Muslim world. In this regard, the liberation of Palestine would result from the unification and strengthening of the *umma* (Islamic community) through a unitary Islamic state. The party then spread from its original base on the Jordanian-ruled West bank to Lebanon, Syria, Egypt, Tunisia, Turkey, Central Asia, Malaysia, and Indonesia. Although the party spread widely, it did not have much support, even over the last twenty years when Islamist groups have enjoyed growing influence. Through the writings of its founder and chief ideologue, Taqiuddin al-Nabhani, however, the party has outlined a blue print for reviving the Islamic caliphate (Commins, 1991, p. 194).

Al-Nabhani's teaching emphasizes three main themes: to persuade Muslims that Islam is preferable to capitalism and socialism/communism as the basis for a modern political, economic, and social order; to analyze Muslims' own history in order to identify the causes of their contemporary political weakness; and to emphasize that Muslims should strive to restore an Islamic state (Commins, 1991, p. 197). Al-Nabhani made comparisons among three ideologies in terms of human order. According to Al-Nabhani, capitalism puts responsibility for establishing social order in the hand of individuals by separating religion from daily life. Communism views social order as being based on the means of production. Islam argues that God created order for humanity and communicated this through the prophets. To implement its order, communism dictates that the state should use the army and the law. Capitalism dictates that the state guard individual freedoms. An Islamic order would guarantee the individual believer's faith in the justice and social order, and cooperation between the nation and the state (Commins, 1991, p. 198).

In its discussion of Islam and democracy, HT insists that the two are incompatible due to the fundamental issue of sovereignty. HT believes that "governance is a function in which humans are subordinate to the primacy of God" (Baran, 2004, p. 18), therefore, it rejects all forms of governance that it sees man-made and therefore

imperfect, like democracy, which it sees as a system of the *kufir* or disbelievers (Al-Nabhani, 1999). In a democracy, sovereignty and authority are held by the people, while in Islam, the ultimate sovereignty is held by God, with authority at best temporally vested in the people. Based on this huge contrast, HT argues that it is not appropriate to conceptualize Islam within a democratic framework (Baran, 2004, p. 18).

Because of the incompatibility it perceives between Islam and democracy, HT believes that “we are already in an ideological clash between the secular democratic ideology and the God-given system.” (Baran, 1999, p. 18). According to HT’s rationale, civilizations are built on ideas, and the intellectual is the main realm of conflict. In order to win this conflict, HT strives to promote its agenda as a way to compete with Western democracy. HT believes that “the new world order” they will help create will be “with the participation of the people, [and] the values of the people ... the resources will be for the people and not used by corrupt rulers that are installed by the West and the multinationals ...” (Baran, 1999, p. 18). Arguing that the Western system is “corrupt” and that the US is losing the hearts and minds of Muslims, HT is increasingly convinced that the majority of the world’s Muslims will ultimately choose its proposal of the system of God (Baran, 1999, p. 18).

“It is now clear for all to see, especially the Muslims who work to restore the rule of Islam and bring life to their ideology, that Western ‘Civilization’ is dead. Dead and buried. The West has failed to convince the Muslims of their ideology, Capitalism. They have failed to convince us of Secularism. The hypocrisy of democracy has become transparent. The charade of international law and the UN has been exposed. The entire Muslim World today calls for a change, and this change is no longer inspired by the western people or the western ideology, but in spite of it”.<sup>4</sup>

Al-Nabhani asserts that the destruction and the abolition of the last caliphate of the Ottoman by Mustafa Kamal was the most disastrous event

in Muslim’s history (Commins, 1991, p. 200)<sup>5</sup>. He argues that this was the root cause of the current political weakness of the global Muslim community. He also argues that since the destruction of the last caliphate, imperialism has effectively distorted Muslim culture and that most Muslims have ignored the importance of establishing an Islamic state in order to implement Islamic law. Indeed, it is difficult for Muslims to imagine an Islamic order due to the influence of Western ideas. Through cultural imperialism, Muslims are informed that they never had a state and that religion must be separated from the state. Although Muslims may be aware of the dangers of cultural imperialism, they are coopted by the ideas which are spread by imperialism to eradicate Islam as a cultural and political force. Therefore, according to Al-Nabhani, the basis of Muslims’ political struggle is to fight imperialism in all its forms (Commins, 1991, p. 201).

Al-Nabhani insists that Islam must be introduced directly into the global arena: “If there is no nation or people who embrace a basic idea, live according to it and convey it world-wide, there can be no hope for the world’s welfare or salvation” (Taji-Farouki, 1996, p. 43). Al-Nabhani urges Muslims to take responsibility to save the world by establishing an Islamic state that will spread Islamic doctrine globally. Comparing the history of Islamic doctrine with that of capitalism, he emphasizes that “for tens of generations and for over a thousand years hundreds of thousands enjoyed stability and dignity, and flourished under the shelter of this idea” (Taji-Farouki, 1996, p. 44).

While the aspiration to revive the caliphate is not popular among Islamic groups at this time, Hizbut Tahrir is the first Islamic group to posit this idea as its ultimate goal. For Al-Nabhani,

<sup>4</sup> See also “The Khilafah Has Been Established”, *Khilafah Magazine*, April 2003, p. 4.

<sup>5</sup> European incitement of the prewar Arab and Turkish nationalist movements and the Arab Revolt paved the way for the empire’s demise. After the war, the occupying allied forces agreed to evacuate Anatolia and Istanbul in return for Mustafa Kamal’s promise to abolish the caliphate. On 3 March 1924, the last caliph, Sultan Abdul Hamid II, had been removed by Mustafa Kamal Attaturk’s secular Turkish government. See David Commins, “Taqi al-Din al-Nabhani and the Islamic Liberation Party”, *the Muslim World*, Vol. XXXI, No. 1–2, 1991, p. 200.

the concept of the caliphate is based on powerful doctrinal and practical assumptions. According to Al-Nabhani, Muslims are obliged to establish and uphold the caliphate system. The companions of the Prophet (*al-khulafa' al-rashidun*) implemented this system during the first generations of Islam and it is seen as the only system that can propagate God's words. For Al-Nabhani, the caliphate is not only spiritual leadership for the *umma*, but also a global Islamic government with the authority to correct the affairs of the global Muslim community (Fealy, 2007, p. 154).

## THE HISTORY OF HIZBUT TAHRIR INDONESIA

Hizbut Tahrir initially appeared in Indonesia between 1982–1983, twenty nine years after Al-Nabhani established HT in Jordan. It appeared through the efforts of two prominent figures, Mama Abdullah bin Nuh and Abdurrahman al-Baghdadi (Arifin, 2005, p. 122; Fealy, 2007, p. 155). Abdullah bin Nuh was a lecturer at one of Indonesia's leading tertiary institutions, the Bogor Agricultural Institute (*Institut Pertanian Bogor/IPB*), and a preacher at *pesantren* (Islamic boarding school) Al-Ghazali in Bogor, West Java. Abdullah bin Nuh was disillusioned with the existing Islamic movements in Indonesia during the late 1970s and believed that they had failed to address the problems facing the Muslim community (Arifin, 2005, p. 122). In his search for an alternative form of Islamic thinking and activism, one which would incorporate both religion and politics, bin Nuh became attracted to the work of HT. He believed that HT was superior in terms of ideology compared to other Islamic movements of the time. During his visits to Sydney, he became familiar with HT's teachings and also came to know HT's activists based in Australia (Fealy, 2007, p. 155). Later on, he invited a charismatic young activist, Abdurrahman al-Baghdadi, to visit Indonesia to disseminate HT's teachings. Al-Baghdadi was a Lebanese national who had joined the Palestinian armed struggle against Israel and according to some accounts had been captured and tortured by Israeli soldiers (Fealy, 2007, p. 155).

Al-Baghdadi used bin Nuh's *pesantren* as his base and started to preach to campus Muslim groups, particularly in the larger state tertiary institutions such as the Bogor Agricultural Institute (*Institut Pertanian Bogor/IPB*), the Bandung Institute of Technology (*Institut Teknologi Bandung/ITB*), the University of Indonesia, Gadjah Mada University, Airlangga University as well as at mosques across Java. In order to increase the number of followers, Al-Baghdadi and bin Nuh conducted *halaqah* (study circles) and *dauroh* (training programs) as the main ways to disseminate HT's teachings. In these early stages, they did not bear the name Hizbut Tahrir in order to avoid attention from Indonesia's intelligence services. During the Soeharto era, these services took a harsh stance towards such groups. As a result, they were active under Lembaga Dakwah Kampus (Campus Dakwah Organization, LDK) name or as a foundation. For instance, in Bogor, the name they used is *Yayasan Kemudi* or The Association of Former LDK activists. Ismail Yusanto, one of the founding members of Hizbut Tahrir in Indonesia, explain that:

"For the first ten years, we focused on gathering followers on [college] campuses. We then entered other centers of gathering—offices, mosques, *pesantren*, and also senior high schools. How? Through basic training. We have special training on four main topics—Islam, personality, sharia, etc ... we were recruiting and gathering ... from campuses and other avenues" (Hwang, 2009: 57).

The downfall of the Soeharto regime in 1998 was a blessing in disguise for the development of HTI. This political event motivated HTI to bring its existence into the public view. At present, HTI claims tens of thousands of members and has a strong presence on the campus of the Bogor Agricultural Institute (*Institut Pertanian Bogor/IPB*); in Yogyakarta, in Central Java; in Jakarta; and in Makassar, in South Sulawesi (Arifin, 2005, p. 122). It also publishes a host of publications including a monthly bulletin, *al-Wa'ie* (ICG Report, 2003, p. 12).

Although HTI's membership is a small percentage compared to mainstream Muslim organizations such as Muhammadiyah and Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) which have millions of members, this does not prevent HTI from spreading its

ideology amongst the Indonesian Muslims community. (Arifin, 2005, p. 122). Unlike many other Islamic groups, HTI is seemingly less interested in a broad mass following and has instead opted for a smaller, more committed group of members coming predominantly from Indonesia's educated middle classes (BBC News, 12 August 2007). This small membership has helped HTI to conduct a number of political activities (Arifin, 2005, p. 122). For example, HTI has actively appeared in several public rallies, successfully mobilizing thousands of demonstrators in support of the implementation of sharia in 2002 and against the US war with Iraq in 2003 (ICG Report, 2007, p. 12). In early 2000 and 2007, HTI held an international conference on the Islamic caliphate issue, both of which attracted significant media coverage<sup>6</sup>.

HTI has appeared publicly, while its leadership remains unclear. The only formal information is that Ismail Yusanto is HTI's spokesperson (Umam, 2006, p. 11). As Umam notes (2006, p. 11), the secrecy over HTI's leadership is influenced by the bitter experience of HT leaders in Arab countries where they have been repressed, tortured, and jailed. One thing that is clear is that HTI has a strict policy of subordination to the central Hizbut Tahrir leadership (Fealy, 2007, p. 158). The central HT board, based in Jordan, presumably keeps a close watch over HTI activities. At least once a year, the chief of the HT central board sends delegates to Indonesia to consolidate HT's activities with local leaders and to guarantee that the central doctrinal views and policies are in accordance with those of locals (Fealy, 2007, p. 158).

Despite accusations that HTI may have connections with other fundamentalist groups, such as Jamaah Islamiyah which is alleged to be responsible for the Bali bombing in October 2002, since its public appearance in 1998, HTI has never been involved in violent activities. What started as an underground campus movement today remains largely campus based, participating in public rallies and meetings where there are no government restrictions (Baran, 2004, p.

<sup>6</sup> The media reported that more than 80,000 Muslims gathered at the 2007 conference, <http://www.csmonitor.com/2007/0813/p99s01-duts.htm>.

42–43). The Indonesian government does watch over its activities. For instance, the government prevented some of HT's internationally-based members from entering the country and speaking at the International Caliphate Conference 2007 in Jakarta, including Imran Waheed (Hizbut Tahrir Britain) and Sheikh Ismail al-Wahwah (Hizbut Tahrir Australia) (BBC News, 13 August 2007)<sup>7</sup>.

## HTI'S GOAL OF RESTORING CALIPHATE

Another feature that distinguishes HTI from other Islamic groups is its high level loyalty to the central leadership's ideology (Fealy, 2007, p. 158). All HT branches across the world have the same ideology, rooted in the thinking of its founder, Taqiuddin al-Nabhani. They believe that the only way to ensure that Muslims live in a just, pious and secure society is by creating a transnational Islamic state headed by caliph. This means that Muslims should not be divided into many states but should be under one global Islamic state or caliphate. Therefore, HTI rejects the idea of nationalism and the nation-state. They see these constructions as weakening and destroying the unity of Muslims all over the world (Umam, 2006, p. 11).

As Umam (2006, p. 11) points out, the objective of restoring an Islamic caliphate is also a response to the domination of the Western powers. According to HTI, the influence and control of the West, and especially the US, over Muslim countries is unacceptable. In the view of this group, when the US unilaterally invaded Afghanistan and Iraq, there was no single Muslim country that challenged it in a significant way, thus proving the weak position of Muslim countries vis-à-vis the West. According to HTI, the only way to confront Western domination is to establish an Islamic caliphate that will strengthen and unify the power of Muslims (Umam, 2006, p. 11). According to Abdullah Robin, a London-based HT leader, HT is "the only political party wanting to unite the *umma*", as opposed to merely uniting Muslims in single nation-states—a political

<sup>7</sup> See also "Massive Hizb ut-Tahrir Caliphate Conference Opens in Jakarta- 100,000 Expected", 11 August 2007, <http://gatewaypundit.blogspot.com/2007/08/massive-hizb-ut-tahrir-caliphate.html>.



unit that HT believes to be “anathema to Islam” (Baran, 2004, p. 17). Therefore, HT faces the challenge of uniting the large number of diverse Muslim groups with different interpretations of Islam. (Baran, 2004, p. 17).

Drawing on al-Nabhani’s thinking, HT sets out a three-stages program for creating an Islamic caliphate. The first stage is known as “culturing” (*tatsqif*), and is focused on the cultivation and recruitment of prospective members into HT (Fealy, 2007, p. 159). In this stage, HT’s ideology of Islam is taught to several individuals, who unite in thought and feeling to form a cell. This “produce[s] people who believe in the idea and the method of the Party, so that they form the Party group” (Baran, 2004, p. 20). The second stage is “interaction” (*tafa’ul*) with the Muslim community, “to let the *umma* embrace and carry Islam, so that the *umma* takes it up as its issue and thus works to establish it in the affairs of life” (Baran, 2004, p. 21). In this stage, the party seeks an “intellectual transformation” through political and cultural interaction to encourage the *umma* to work towards HT’s revolution.

The final stage, “seeking power” (*istilamu al hukm*), involves gaining control of government and “totally implementing Islam” across the world or in other words, revolution (Fealy, 2007, p. 159). According to Baran (2004, p. 22), this stage is accomplished once the *umma* has embraced HT’s interpretation of Islam as an intellectual philosophy, a mode of behavior, and a political issue. HTI’s intention is to take power, while their stated preference is to conduct non-violent political revolution through the infiltration of government institutions and the recruitment of key figures who would join the party and align governments with the ideals of HT (Baran, 2004, p. 21). According to Fealy (2007, p. 159), this is “outside assistance” (*nusrah*) used to gain power which is used by HT to accelerate the accomplishment of the third stage. In the Indonesian context, the period from the 1980s to 2000 illustrates HTI’s culturing phase. Recently, however, HTI entered the second phase, interacting with the Indonesian Muslim community in order to more widely promote its ideas (Fealy, 2007, p. 159).

## CALIPHATE VIS-À-VIS NATION-STATE IN INDONESIAN CONTEXT

The Islamic revival has gained significant momentum in the Muslim world but at the same time, there are indications that many secular nation-states in the Muslim world have not been able to fulfill their promises to their people (Azra, 2004, p. 135). The credibility of secular regimes has been eroded and creating skepticism about their capability (Azra, 2004, p. 135). This is evident in the attempts carried out by the HTI to replace the secular regime and nation-state of Indonesia. By emphasizing that the continuing crises in Indonesia are multidimensional, HTI seeks to show that these crises are the consequence of the secular system and that these problems will be corrected only once a caliphate has been restored. This has become the justification for HTI to call for radical change in Indonesia, instead of calling for partial solutions which fail to grasp the root cause of the problem (Fealy, 2007, p. 162).

At every opportunity, HTI emphasises two main themes: firstly, the decline of Islam and the constant domination of the West; secondly, the restoration of the caliphate as the destiny of all Muslims. For example, in its publication, *al-Wa’ie*, HTI emphasizes the suffering and bitter experiences of Muslims due to Western domination:

“Now, after more than 80 years without a caliphate, the suffering of the Islamic community is worsening. Islamic states are split into tens of countries which are controlled by Western occupiers. Imagine, they (Islamic nations) can’t save Palestine which is occupied by tiny Israel or Iraqi citizens who are being butchered. The blood of Muslims is so easily spilt by US occupiers and their allies, who are helped by traitorous agents from the Islamic community itself. Even though the Islamic community has more than 1.5 billion people, poverty, ignorance and conflict are synonymous with Islamic states. This is the result of secularization. This is the result of the collapse of the Islamic Caliphate (Fealy, 2007, p. 162).”

On the issue of the urgent need to restore the caliphate, the chairman of HTI’s Central Leadership Board, Hafidz Abdurrahman, highlights that “every Muslim is obliged to take up the cause towards the implementation of sharia” (Hassan,

2006, p. 5). HTI's spokesperson, Muhammad Ismail Yusanto, asserts that the existing secular system failed from the beginning since it neglected the role of religion in the Indonesian public sphere and regarded religion as an individual matter (Hassan, 2006, p. 5). At public rallies, HTI upholds the slogan "Save Indonesia with sharia". HTI believes that Indonesia's dependence on Western countries will be eliminated through the implementation of sharia. Yusanto emphasizes that sharia can be applied to all humankind since it is pertinent to solving problems confronted by all peoples regardless of their ethnicity or religion. In this sense sharia is regarded as universal, being based on the universality of Islam (Hassan, 2006, p. 5).

Muhammad al-Khaththath, HTI's leader, argues similarly that despite the dominant power of secular ideologies, including nationalism, socialism, and capitalism, there has been a general failure to combine both material and spiritual dimensions of human experience in a holistic account of humankind. Al-Khaththath emphasizes the importance of sharia to fulfil the spiritual potential of humankind and as a means to accelerate the establishment of the caliphate system. For al-Khaththath, sharia is the only system that can bring Indonesia out of its current crises and can achieve prosperity, wealth, and justice (Hassan, 2006, p. 5).

Due to its rejection of the secular system, HTI prefers to struggle outside the parliamentary system. It refuses, therefore, to take part in parliamentary democracy and the electoral processes in Indonesia. Indeed, the secular system would not allow the implementation of sharia. Therefore, HTI prefers to struggle for its goal through the *umma* instead of the secular system. Although other Islamic groups have been struggling for the implementation of sharia through the parliamentary system, HTI argues that this struggle is limited and has not achieved significant results (Al-Jawi, 2006). History has shown that such a struggle has led to failure, such as in Algeria through the FIS (Front Islamique du Salut) in 1991–1992, as well as in Turkey through the Refah Party (Welfare Party) in 1995<sup>8</sup>. It is impossible, therefore, to

<sup>8</sup> In 1991, FIS won a majority of the seats in the Algerian parliamentary elections. After the army took over control

achieve such a goal through democracy. HTI also refuses to promote the principle of pluralism in democracy, since pluralism treats all religions equally. It leads to the repudiation of sharia as a state's constitution. HTI claims that democracy can be seen as a justification for the international conspiracy to manipulate Muslims and to deter them from achieving their sacred destiny to live under the caliphate and the sharia system (Hassan, 2006, p. 19).

HTI also criticizes the view that *shura* (Islamic consultation) is equal to democracy. According to HTI, *shura* is part of sharia. It accordingly puts sovereignty in the hands of God. In contrast to democracy, and particularly with regard to the decision making process, *shura* not only involves people voices, but also several steps of careful consideration. Accordingly, in the legislation process (*al-tashri'*), decisions cannot be based on the majority or minority principle, but rather on legal texts, the Quran, and the Sunna, since God is the lawgiver, not the people. HTI suggests that the function of the ruler (caliph) resembles the role of the Prophet Muhammad as the leader of the *umma* (Hassan, 2006, p. 19).

In order to accelerate its goal, HTI has been active in campaigning for sharia. It has proposed a legal draft for a sharia-based penal code. Ironically, however, HTI refuses to take part in any government initiative to discuss legal codes. HTI asserts that as long as the caliphate has not yet been established, it is useless to attempt such a task. The HTI leader of Yogyakarta branch, Muhammad Siddiq Al-Jawi, confirms that HTI has only been involved in the making of some academic drafts of sharia-based regional regulations. It has never gone further than that process (Hassan, 2006, p. 19). HTI leaders carefully remind Muslims of the dangers of the "democracy

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of the government, the president was forced to resign and the parliament was called off. Later on in 1992, FIS was banned and its leaders were arrested. See "Front Islamique du Salut", <http://i-cias.com/e.o/fis.htm>. Similarly, in the 1995 national legislative elections, Refah Party became the first religious party in Turkey to win a general election. Following its conflict with the army and other secular elements, it left power in 1997 and was subsequently banned. See Binnaz Toprak, "Religion and State in Turkey", <http://www.tau.ac.il/dayancenter/mel/toprak.htm>.

trap”, which they claim to be a “biological child of secularism” (Hassan, 2006, p. 19). HTI also organized a public conference (*Tabligh Akbar*), on 6 March 2005 in Bogor, a city where HTI has strong support, with the central theme of calling for the implementation of sharia. Interestingly, several regional governmental officers attended this congregation (Hassan, 2006, p. 20).

Muslim scholars have different opinions regarding HTI’s goal of restoring an Islamic caliphate. For instance, the rector of the State Islamic University Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta (*Universitas Islam Negeri/UIN*), Azyumardi Azra argues that the contemporary resurgence of the idea of a single and universal caliphate is problematic (Azra, 2004, p. 136). Azra says that this idea is based on “historical and religious romanticism as well as misconceptions of not only the very meaning of the caliphate but also of the historical development of the caliphate itself in the period of the post-Prophet Muhammad” (2004, p. 136). He asserts that “supporters of the caliphate have confused and have failed to distinguish between the original and genuine caliphate during the “Rightly Guided Caliphs” (*al-khulafa’ al-rashidun*) and the despotic monarchies of the Umayyads, the Abbasids, and the Ottomans” (Azra, 2004, p. 136). The first two caliphs, Abu Bakar and Umar ibn al-Khattab, were elected on their qualities, whereas the succeeding caliphs, in the post-*al-khulafa’ al-rashidun* period were basically kings (*muluk*) who had uncontested rights and privileges over other Muslims. Therefore, “modern thinkers of the caliphate such as Jamal al-Din al-Afghani, ‘Abd al-Rahman al-Kawakibi, Rashid Ridha, Sayyid Qutb, and Abu al-A’la al-Mawdudi have all refused to recognize the credibility and legitimacy of those Muslim kings as caliphs” (Azra, 2004, p. 136).

These thinkers have different and even conflicting ideas on the basic concept of caliphate. Al-Kawakibi and Rida, on the one hand, assert that the caliph should be an Arab of the Quraysh tribe. Al-Mawdudi, on the other hand, strongly rejects this idea and insists that the caliph should be elected democratically from all Muslims and should exhibit qualities set by a special electing body called “*ahl al-halli wa al-‘aqad*” (*Majlis*

*al-Shura*). Al-Mawdudi asserts that the exalted position of the caliph should not be set aside for an Arab since Arabs do not have exclusive privileges over other non-Arab Muslims (Azra, 2004, p. 136).

Azra goes on to criticize the idea of adopting sharia law in Indonesia as it would be “detrimental to the world’s most populous Muslim nation” (Peter, 2007). He goes on to argue that the implementation of sharia in Indonesia is currently illegal and that the nation’s supreme court must make this clear (Peter, 2007). Like Azra, the chairman of the Muhammadiyah (the Muslim mainstream organization), Din Syamsuddin, suggests that the caliphate discourse should not undermine the inclusivism and pluralism of the nation (Peter, 2007). He notes that non-Muslims should not be afraid of the discourse on the caliphate as it was part of the democratic process (Peter, 2007). Effendy (2003, p. 7) also asserts that the idea of establishing an Islamic state in formal ideological terms is not significant. He believes that Islam is compatible with the secular system and what is important here is that the state guarantees the existence of Islam’s basic values.

In his observations on HTI’s publications, Fealy (2007, p. 163) has found that the material is largely aimed at a well-educated and urban audience. He has also found that the material leaves little room for an open-minded analysis. For instance, the depiction of the caliphal tradition in Islam builds on ahistorical arguments. In HTI’s texts, it is rare to find any reference to the limitations and failures of the caliphate as an institution, especially the role of the caliphate in relation to ensuring the political unity, stability and prosperity of the global *umma*. Fealy (2007, p. 163) criticizes the HTI literature as mostly developed from an idealized and romanticized perspective of the caliphate.

In response to these criticisms, HTI’s spokesman, Ismail Yusanto, has said that its view of the caliphate is not romanticism. He argues that the judgment of the Muslim scholar, Azyumardi Azra, that HTI was grieving over the downfall of the last Ottoman caliphate was inaccurate. Following the International Caliphate Conference 2007, in Jakarta, he stated:

“As a spokesman of Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia, I clarified time after time that this event was not meant to mourn and extend the sorrow of the fall of the Ottoman Caliphate since it was inappropriate to always mourn such a thing. Besides, Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia has never said that the caliphate to be established should be like the last Ottoman caliphate. Rather, it aims to be similar to ‘*khilafah ‘ala minhaji an nubuwwah*’ (caliphate on the path of Prophethood) to take the example of the Prophet Muhammad (saw.) and which was then continued by the *al-khulafa’ al-rashidun* (rightly-guided caliphs) who were the Prophet’s prominent companions” (Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia, 2007).

The important thing for HTI is that the reestablishment of the caliphate be an obligation felt by Muslims, and one not based only on the historical facts. HTI would prefer it to be ordered by God and His Prophet, that is, as a way to implement sharia and to represent the Muslim brotherhood (Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia, 2007). However, this does not mean that historical facts are not important. Some lessons from history reveal that caliphates create problems, therefore the caliphate system which HTI proposes is one based on ideal used Islamic norms (Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia, 2007). Thus, although there were issues with particular caliphs, this does not mean that the caliphate system itself is wrong, since it is inappropriate to blame the whole system by referring to the faults of some of the rulers. Those caliphs who turned away from ideal Islamic norms should not, according to HTI, be allowed to hide the historical fact of the golden era of the caliphate (Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia, 2007).

This fact has been documented by a number of historians, including Will Durant (1953), who wrote in his book, *The Story of Civilizations*, that for centuries the caliphate was successful in providing security and prosperity to a significant population over vast area<sup>9</sup>. Paul Kennedy (1987), in *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers: Eco-*

<sup>9</sup> Reflecting on the historical records, in several centuries before 1500 AD, the Muslim world was more developed than Europe in the fields of culture and technology. It had great cities, educated peoples, and excellent use of resources. Indeed, some cities had qualified universities and complete libraries as well as beautiful mosques. The Muslims also led in the fields of mathematics, cartography, medicine, and other aspects of science and industries at that time, <http://www.hizbut-tahrir.or.id/kki>.

*nomic Change and Military Conflict from 1500 to 2000* wrote about the Ottoman caliphate as follows: “[the] Ottoman Empire was more than just a military machine. It had become an elite conqueror which was able to develop a unified faith, cultures, and language in greater areas than that of the Roman Empire and of greater population”.

Looking back on the history of the spread of Islam in Indonesia, the Ottoman caliphate also played a significant role. The caliphate sent many Islamic preachers (*ulama*) including those called *Walis* (Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia, 2007). The Ottoman also gave assistance to the Sultan of Aceh to fight against the Portuguese. Nurudin Ar Ranini (1966) in his book “*Bustanus Salatin*”, wrote that the Sultan of Aceh received military assistance including weaponry and instructors from the caliphate.

In response to critics who claim that the establishment of a caliphate in Indonesia is unthinkable, HTI argues that it is unthinkable that Muslims will not struggle hard to achieve it. Uniting the *umma* is a huge and difficult task as well as the challenge, however, HTI believes that it is not a utopian dream. If an awareness corresponding to the vision and mission of statehood is given to the Muslim *umma*, it should not be impossible to realize such dream (Al-Jawi, 2006). Due to the nature of Islamic propagation, which is aimed at all humanity (*kaffatan li an-nash*) and is meant to give good virtues to the universe (*rahmatan lil alamin*), the unification of the Muslim *umma* is not deemed impossible. As leader of the HTI branch of Yogyakarta, Siddiq Al-Jawi has noted (2006) that historically, we have seen the establishment of the Soviet Union in 1917, predicated upon the Marxist ideology. History tells how after the Bolshevik revolution, the Soviet Union emerged and become one of the superpower in the world. Reflecting on these historical records, it is not impossible to imagine that there will be such a new society and a new state based on Islamic norms and ideals and which will likewise turn out to be a global power (Al-Jawi, 2006).

Despite all the conceptual and practical problems surrounding the idea of the caliphate



today, restoring the caliphate seems to have continually fascinated certain groups of Muslims throughout the world, including those in Indonesia. HTI has grown rapidly in the past decade, both in terms of the size of its membership and the structure of its organization. Recently, HTI infiltrated rural areas and has gained significant influence in semi-government institutions such as the Indonesian Ulama Council (*Majlis Ulama Indonesia*/MUI). Despite this expansion, however, there is still skepticism about HTI among mainstream Muslims in Indonesia. The Hizbut Tahrir ideology appeals to certain elements of the Islamic community in Indonesia, however, it does not have wide resonance among the Muslim community there. The majority of Indonesian Muslims, as represented by mainstream organizations such as the Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) and Muhammadiyah and by Muslim political parties, do not pay significant attention to this issue. This indicates that Indonesian mainstream Muslims are not interested much in the idea of restoring the caliphate, let alone in supporting its realization in Indonesia.

## CONCLUSION

This study has shown through its analysis of debates between the idea of restoring an Islamic caliphate and the idea of the nation-state as the only legitimate political entity in Indonesia that these two perspectives are fundamentally incompatible. By analyzing the history and ideology of HTI, it was possible to explain the competition between nationalists (who promote and protect the secular system) and Islamists (who have a different conception of how the state should be). The analysis reveals that the tension between HTI and other elements of Indonesian society regarding how the state should be ordered symbolizes the continuing competition between Islamists and nationalists. The Islamic caliphate which HTI strives for is an alternative global model of how to order world affairs. As such, it is incompatible with the contemporary secular nation-state system.

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